

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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2 September 1998 **No of pages including this one: 2**

To: HQ **From: Belfast**
For: Secretary Gallagher **From: Joint Secretary**

Subj: Release of Wright and Fisher

1. Today's decision by the Secretary of State to release Guardsmen Wright and Fisher comes as no surprise. We received signals some time ago (earlier reports refer) that this move could be expected a few days ahead of the first releases under the new legislation. A number of hints were given in public by British Ministers about a possible release in the last week of August.

2. Peter Bell confirmed this morning that the choice of today is dictated not only by the political need to move in advance of next Monday, and the desire not to introduce media distractions from the Clinton visit, but also to provide a sweetener for the Tories in the context of today's Westminster debate.

3. He apologised for his side's failure to give us advance notice. As I mentioned, we enquired yesterday and were promised a response but none was eventually forthcoming. It appears that the decision was formally taken late last night. The Prison Service faxed the news to Bell and his colleagues at 8am this morning for transmission to us. The press release issued at 8.30am. Wright and Fisher were released at that time.

4. The Secretary of State's action in informing the McBride relatives late last night that she was considering her decision, followed by a call early this morning in which she told them that she had decided to release Wright and Fisher, is being related to the arrangements announced yesterday for the giving of advance notice to relatives of victims in relation to the early release of paramilitary prisoners. The Secretary of State was anxious that the same degree of sensitivity should be shown in relation to

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the McBride family.

5. The decision to release the names tomorow of the individuals to be released next week, Bell indicated, is partly intended as a means of taking the heat out of today's move from the nationalist perspective.

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